



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
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March 14, 2022

Steven T. James
House Clerk
State House, Room 145
Boston, MA 02133

Michael D. Hurley
Senate Clerk
State House, Room 335
Boston, MA 02133

RE: Commission on Autism COVID-19 Study

Dear Clerks James & Hurley:

Section 124 of Chapter 24 of the Acts of 2021 (FY22 budget) directed the Autism Commission to investigate and report on the impact of COVID-19, on Black, Latinx, Asian American and Pacific Islander, Native American and other individuals of color who have a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder. It also requires that the commission make recommendations to address any inequities caused by the outbreak of COVID-19 including, but not be limited to, establishing periodic benchmarks and cost estimates for a coordinated system-wide response to address the inequitable impact of the outbreak of COVID-19 and the recovery process on Black, Latinx, Asian American and Pacific Islander, Native American and other individuals of color with autism spectrum disorder, no later than January 1, 2022.

The Executive Director of the Autism Commission met with representatives of the Department of Public Health (DPH), MassHealth, the Department of Developmental Services (DDS), the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC), and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to determine the available data and information on the range of supports and services provided to individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) by race and ethnicity during COVID-19. The respective agencies

reported that they do not currently collect or possess the data for ethnicity and race to identify any inequities caused by the pandemic and make recommendations to address them. Some agencies have traditionally collected data on race and ethnicity as an optional field only and will revise their practices to make this mandatory, and local educational agencies only report this data in the aggregate to DESE for individuals with ASD receiving special education services. The Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) is committed to improving its data collection processes across our agencies in the areas of race and ethnicity. We recognized this need during the pandemic, and our agencies had already initiated efforts to review their data collection processes and to address the need for more data on race and ethnicity for the individuals we serve.

The report required by Section 124 of Chapter 24 of the Acts of 2021, the FY22 budget, has not been completed at this time and I ask that this letter serve as a formal request for an extension for this study until January 1, 2023. We are committed to completing the study and the report when more data on race and ethnicity becomes available through our improved data collection in progress.

Sincerely,



Marylou Sudders

Cc: Senator Adam Gomez
Senator Joan Lovely
Senator Ryan Fattman
Representative Michael Finn
Representative Christine Barber
Representative Joseph McKenna